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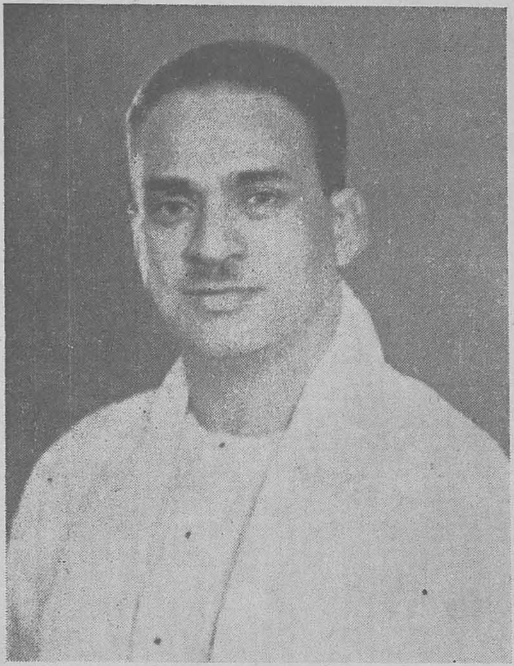

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KANNADA LITERATURE

By

Sri M. M. BHAT, *Head of the Kannada Department, University of Madras*

Kannada is one of the oldest cultivated languages of India. It belongs to the family of languages known as Dravidian. Tamil, Telugu and Malayalam are the other important members of that family. During its progressive march of centuries, Kannada had developed certain dialects, such as Badaga, Gowda, Havyaka, Kota, Tuda, Kodagu which are still spoken in certain rural tracts of Karnataka.

It is difficult to trace the origin of the word Kannada. Karnataka is evidently its Sanskritised form. The word Kannada, denotes the Kannada country, Kannada Language and the Kannada people. Scholars like Rev. Father Heras have opined that there are evidences to prove that Kannada people lived during the days of Mohenjo Daro civilization. The words Karnataka and Kuntala (an ancient epithet for the main division of Karnataka) are found in the great epic *Mahabharata* which fact alone will suffice to establish the antiquity of Kannada, hundreds of years before the Christian era.

FIFTH CENTURY INSCRIPTION

We do not come across any written specimen in Kannada till about the middle of the fifth century A.D. First we are greeted by the Halmidi Sasana (450 A.D.), the earliest extant inscription written in the archaic Kannada language and old Kannada characters. Acts of heroism and the grants to the deserving are expressed in unequivocal terms. Judging from the language employed in the inscription, we can safely state that it must have taken several centuries for it to perfect such a stage of growth.

The earliest extant Kannada work is "*Kaviraja Marga*," (the Royal Road for Poets) a monumental work on Poetics written by that illustrious Rastrakuta king, Nripatunga Amoghavarsa (814-877). It is a truism that works on Grammar and Poetics, etc., are produced in a language only after the creation of good literature. Kannada cannot be an exception. Besides innumerable useful rules on Poetics, the work furnishes a fund of information about the Kannada country, its people, the names of great writers of old (both in poetry and prose), types of compositions, etc.

Here are some sidelights on the Karnataka of the ninth century, as found in that book:—

"The Kannada banner flew aloft in brilliant splendour during the reign of Nripatunga from the Kaveri in the South to the Godavari in the North. The tract comprising Kisuvolal (modern Pattadakal), Koppananagar (modern Koppal in Hyderabad State). Puligere (Lakshmerwar) and Onkunda was the very marrow of Kannada Nadu. Kannada spoken there was considered the pure well of Kannada undefiled.

"Capable are the people of that country in making speeches with apt words and in understanding and judging speeches made by others. Being naturally skilful, even without special study, they are well-versed in the usages of poetry. All of them are wise in their speeches."

ROYAL PATRONAGE

From here onwards there has been a steady growth of Kannada Literature in almost all branches. Both quantity and quality are such as to bring credit to those gifted savants who produced them. One noteworthy fact is that there has been royal patronage for art and literature throughout the course of the long and chequered history of Karnataka, as in the case of all other important languages in India. Whatever religion the king professed, deserving poets and scholars—irrespective of their caste or creed—basked in the royal sunshine. Some of the illustrious kings of Karnataka were themselves poets. Thus we see them serving the Goddess of Muse directly or indirectly. Nripatunga was the foremost among them.

Rastrakutas, Gangas, Chalukyas, Kakateyas, Hoysalas, kings of Saundatti, Vijayanagar, Mysore and

Tuluva, Nayaks of Ummattur, Keladi, Belur, Hadinadu, Kalale, Ikkeri are the important names that have become immortal by their unbounded munificience to men of letters. Such patronage usually did not interfere with the natural course of the Muse with the poets concerned. They were not employed to sing the glory of kings in season and out of season. They had perfect freedom, and royal patronage only enabled them to pursue their literary work with singleness of purpose and ease. The Kings honoured themselves by honouring such celebrities. They were real Poets-Laureates (*Kavichakravartis*) and produced excellent works which have become immortal. Pampa, Ponna, Ranna and Janna are the beacon lights among them. This way, things went on till about the 18th century.

But after the advent of the British in our country, there was no royal patronage or State support extended to our languages in general. Kannada too came to be neglected. The medium of instruction in schools and colleges was English and the administration of the State carried on in English. English occupied the honoured place. In these circumstances, it is no wonder that Kannada was starved. However, the national awakening in the country breathed a new spirit into Kannada literature from the twenties of this century. There has been much creative work in the field of poetry and prose by gifted authors imbibed with current ideas and modern thought.

NATIONAL AWAKENING

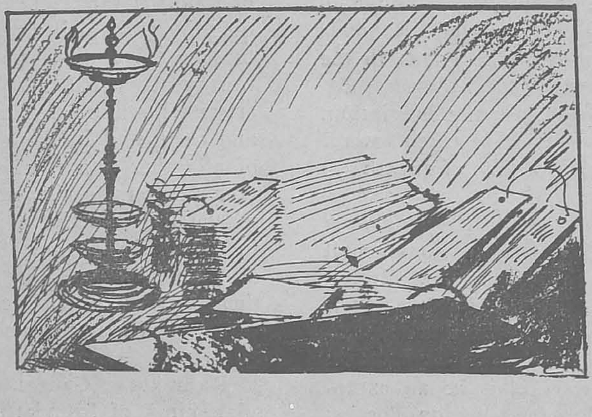
Now the atmosphere is still brighter and more heartening. With the setting up of our own governments at the Centre and the States, a fillip is given to an all-round development of our languages. In our State of Madras, the first act of national service to Kannada was done when they made instruction through mother-tongue compulsory in schools and declared Kannada as the first language in the scheme of studies. The institution of Poet-Laureate in our languages is in keeping with our national traditions and will go a long way to enhance the prestige of ourselves and our languages. It is a token of the recognition of poetic talent.

Another generous gesture on the part of our State Government is an annual award of three prizes to the value of Rs. 500 each to the authors of best Kannada works (on three subjects) produced during the year.

In Kannada as in other Indian languages, there are innumerable old manuscripts of ancient works which have not yet seen the light of day. The Government have stepped in before it is too late and set up expert committees to advise them in the matter of the selection of manuscripts suitable for publication. Accordingly some useful rare works of old have been published last year.

Thus we see that Kannada, one of the oldest languages of India, with its vast and varied literature, after a setback during the last century, is making good progress in a better atmosphere. We have begun well. Let Kannada grow to greater glory alongside of her sisters.

Siri-Kannadam-Gelge !



TELUGU LITERATURE

By

SRI N. VENKATA RAO, *Head of the Telugu Department, University of Madras*

Among the Dravidian family languages, four of which have reached a high standard of literacy excellence, Telugu occupies the second place, i.e., next to Hindi in the Indian Union according to census statistics, but certainly the first in point of melody and charm of diction. The euphonic sweetness and the phonetic completeness of Telugu made it the best suited medium for music and it is primarily due to this rare linguistic phenomenon that Telugu possesses the most extensive musical literature in Indian vernaculars.

Folk song or Desi Padasahitya forms the basis of *Marga* or *Pada Sahitya,* the vocabulary of which is built up enriched by the process of assimilation and adoption of Desi or indigenous, Prakrit and Sanskrit words. Since the structure of versification entirely depends upon Telugu Prosody which in turn was evolved out of the *Pada Sahitya* or song with all its rhythmic subtlities. Telugu poetry lent itself to musical setting without losing its intrinsic linguistic worth and literary value. This curious harmonious blending of *Sangita* and *Sahitya* (music and poetry) formed the most outstanding feature of literary compositions, which have been coming down to us for the past twelve centuries or more in various branches of literature comprising *Itihasa Purana, Kavya, Prabandha, Dwipada Sataka, Yakshagana, Udaharana, Dandaka Sankirthana* and technical sciences.

GALAXY OF ROYAL POETS

Telugu literature from the beginning flourished under the patronage of kings and their subordinates, some of whom are exceptionally great poets, versatile scholars, and epoch-makers. We have a galaxy of royal poets in Telugu, whose works are being studied even today, and who were also patrons of poets. The names of Rajaraja Narendra of the Eastern Chalukyas, Manumasiddi of Telugu Cholas, Reddis of Kondavidu, Krishnadeva Raya of the Vijayanagar dynasty, the Tanjore Madurai Nayaks and the rulers of Pudukkottai and Mysore in the extreme south, are inseparably associated with great poets like Nannaya, Nannai Choda, Tikkana Errana, Srinatha, Surana and Chemakura. Particularly, Krishnadeva Raya, the Kannada Raya, declared that Telugu is the best of the vernaculars (*Desa Bashalandu Telugu Lessa*) and made it his court language.

In this connection, it is worthy of notice that even the non-Telugu rulers like the Nawabs of Golkonda, and the Mahratta Rajas of Tanjore, being enamoured by the melody of the language encouraged and patronised Telugu Literature. After the advent of the company rule, C. P. Brown proverbial for his patronage of Telugu poets, rendered everlasting service to literature, by raising it to the high status which it attained in former days. The Telugu ruling chiefs of the various samasthanams maintained the old tradition and they are continued even today, by well-known patrons like the Maharaja of Pithapuram.

IMPACT WITH WORLD CULTURE

Owing to the implantation of the British rule, a foreign language like English became the chief language, and the vernaculars suffered a setback. But an impetus was given by the Universities for the study of language and literature from the purely academical point of view, and thus Telugu literature came into contact with a foreign culture through the British medium.

The intervention of such culture exercised great influence over Telugu Literature and while there is a tendency to preserve old traditions, the general trend favoured the modern lines of thought and culture. But on the attainment of freedom, which ushered in a new era in the development of regional languages, our ideals and ideas have expanded and we have come into contact not only with Indian culture in general but also with world culture in particular.

It is the duty of Telugu literature now to interpret and assimilate our old literature in the light of modern thought.

STATE ENCOURAGEMENT

It is in the fitness of things therefore that the Popular Government have encouraged both the old and modern types of literature. The activities of the Government may be classified under the following five heads which deserve the attention of every literary historian. They are: (1) making the regional language as the first language; (2) the starting of Telugu encyclopedia through Telugu Bhasha Samiti; (3) the Institution of poet laureateship; (4) the publication of old manuscripts; (5) and the award of prizes for the best books on modern subjects.

The institution of Poet-Laureateship and the publication of old manuscripts are but revivals of old traditions. Our present receipient Poet-Laureateship in Telugu especially may be termed as a Kavi Sarvabhauma, an epitome of old cultural traditions.

RARE WORKS PUBLISHED

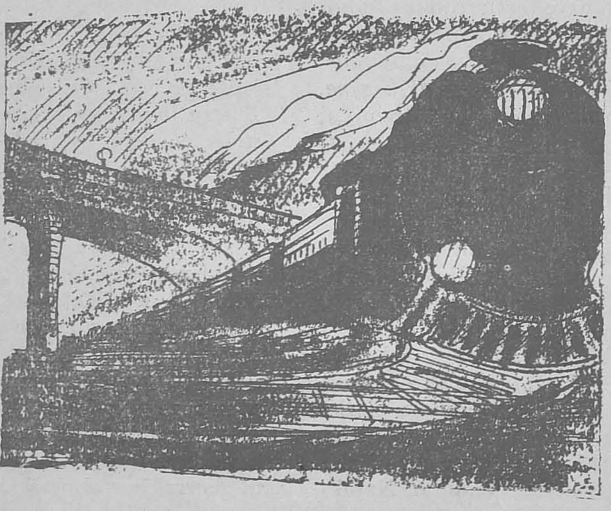
The publication of rare Telugu works really opened the hidden literary treasuries. The two big depositories of manuscripts, the Madras Government Oriental Library and the Tanjore Saraswati Mahal Library, were granted large sums for publications and the following are the works:

Khadgalakshana Siromani (the science of Swords), *Dhanurvidya Vilasamu* (the Science of Archery), *Aushadhayogamulu, Vydyanighantu* (medicine), *Yoya Darsana Vishayamu* (Philosophy), *Taladasapranapradipika* (Music), *Raghunathabhudayamu*, (History), and *Dwipada Ramayanamu* by Katta Varadaraju.' All the six works were hitherto unknown and throw a flood of light in the respective branches of knowledge. They were edited by experienced scholars with critical introductions in English and Telugu.

The award of prizes for the best books on modern subjects encouraged many a scholar and is instrumental in bringing to light latent faculties. The subjects selected relate to both arts and sciences. They are poetry, literary criticism, research in language, drama, novel, short story, biography, childrens' literature, psychology, agriculture, physiology, electricity, indigenous medicine, social studies, and cooperative economics.

The importance given to Telugu both in the school and college curriculum, and the inauguration of the Encyclopedia, has effaced illiteracy, and thanks to the Popular Government, there is an ever-increasing literary population and reading public; from the common man to the profound scholar, all are literally educated with modern outlook.

Thus by preserving and fostering the old cultural traditions, and by encouraging modern cultural influences, the Popular Government has brought the Telugu nation to the threshold of world culture. The literary patronage of the present Government forms the crowning chapter in the History of Telugu Literature.



MALAYALAM LITERATURE

By

Dr. C. A. MENON, *Head of the Malayalam Department, University of Madras*

There is no need to enter into the controversy regarding the Malayalam language. On one point opinion is unanimous, namely, that it belongs to the Dravidian family of languages. Greek records tell us that the Malayalam country had contact with the West even three thousand years ago when Solomon used to send his ships to Chaliyam, near Calicut, to buy gold, silver, peacock and pepper, and Ptolemy mentions "Kero Brothos" (Kerala Putran) as a sovereign outside Limuriko (Tamizhakam). This evidence takes us to a remote period in the history of the Malayalam country when it enjoyed an independent status, developing a culture of its own.

This view is amply supported by the material available in the ancient ritualistic song called *Torrams*—literally, inspired songs—sung during the ceremony called *Pana*, by which the Mother Goddess Kali (*Amma*) was propitiated. These *Torrams* bear no trace of the influence of either Tamil or Sanskrit which found its way into the Malayalam language later. Mother worship and martial characteristics have been an integral part of the culture of Kerala. The literature and art of Malabar owe much of their inspiration to these two prominent traits. From very early times mother worship has been responsible for a series of rituals and ceremonies round which a vast volume of literature in the form of songs are grown. They go by the generic term *Torram* and *Kalampattu*.

MARTIAL BALLADS

The 10th century A.D., produced a hero by name Aromal Chevakar in North Malabar, whose '*Ankom*' (fight-duel) forms the theme of inspiring ballard that bristles with martial fervour. He remains a hero, pure and simple. The tendency for deification seems to have waned by this time. His sister Unniyarcha also was another valiant fighter. There are ballads about her exploits too. The heroic ballads kept alive the martial glory of Kerala up to Othenan of North Malabar, a hero who lived at the end of the 15th century A.D.

From the political evolution and convulsions in South Malabar sprung another type of ballad called "*Caver*" which centre round the Mamamkam festival held at Tirunavaya where the kings of Kerala fought for the overlordship of Kerala. Walluvanad Rajah once presided over the festival.

TAMIL INFLUENCE

It is noteworthy that these types of songs are not to be found in the southern part of Kerala, comprising Cochin and Travancore, where ritualistic songs about Kali are current. Only with the rise of Kannaki tradition associated with the Kali at Cranganore, a new theme which is unknown in the North was added to that love. The Kannaki cult heralded the Tamil influence in Kerala which, though it dates from the 2nd century A.D. did not penetrate to the North.

Ramacharitam, a bilingual poem dealing with the story of Yudhakandam, is considered by some as the earliest literary work in Malayalam. It originated from South Travancore, as is evident from the language which is a mixture of Tamil and Malayalam, and neither Malayalees nor Tamilians are prepared to claim the work as theirs. But its literary merit is beyond dispute, and the poem is ever considered to belong to the 10th century.

The period between the 10th and 13th century A.D. has not been fruitful in literary production. Probably the gradual change from the rule of Perumals to that of the kings of the country and consequent dislocation in administration gave people no peace to think of artistic activity or creative effort. There were other unseen activities also. The Aryan

emigrants to the West Coast seem to have used this opportunity for peaceful infiltration, to introduce their culture into the land of their adoption through their language Sanskrit. The Vaishnavite element dominant in these epics gradually affected the Mother cult and the allied Siva cult that had taken strong roots in the land. The result was a compromise and the old and the new cults dropped their original vigour and made mutual adjustments.

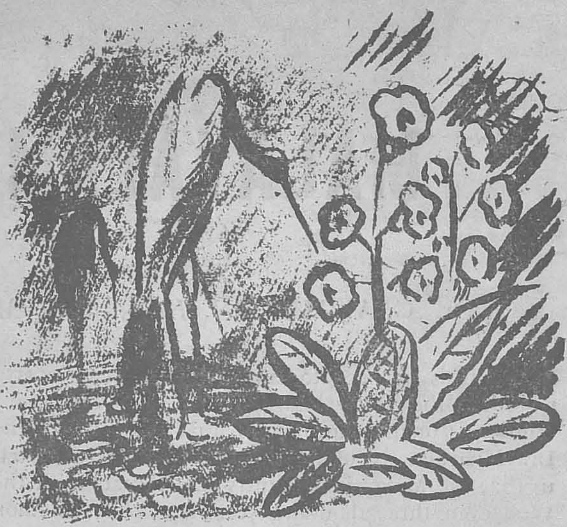
NIRANAM POETS

Niranam poets of the 14th century A.D., reflect this change that has come over Kerala. Three in number—Madhavan, Sankaran and Kannassan (Raman)—flourished nearly a century after Cherusseri in Central Travancore. The first translated *Bhagavatgita*—the first translation in Dravidian languages and the second rendered *Bharatam* into Malayalam. The third Raman, Kannassan, the most notable of the group, wrote the *Ramayanam* following Valmiki more or less faithfully. His work can be called an independent translation of the original and his narration is felicitous and vigorous. Some of his ideas found their echo in Ezhuthachan's works. The poets also preferred to write in the Pattu style and here and there display a Tamil bias in a subtle form.

Cherusseri's *Krishna Gatha* and the *Ramayana Champu* of Punam (15th century A.D.) may be regarded as the outcome of this period. Both are Nambudiri authors. The former deals with the story of Krishna and covers the 10th *Skantha* (Chapter) of *Bhagavatham*. Sanskrit words have crept in but they have undergone structural modifications to suit the genius and melody of the Malayalam language. Malayalam words preponderate in the poem and the new intrusion passes to a certain extent unnoticed. The amorous propensities of Krishna are graphically described by Cherusseri but their inner meanings are not ignored. This double attraction at once proclaimed the work as a classic.

INFLUENCE OF SANSKRIT

The *Ramayana Champu* of Punam goes to the other extreme. It is mostly Sanskrit and the words are given the Sanskrit terminations also. Punam covers the whole of *Ramayana* in eight *Champus*. The treatment is invested with a humorous flavour which is inherent even in its form, as a composition in mixed prose and poetry. But the prose is a misnomer. It is an indigenous metre, conforming to the requirements of Tarangini which later found its way to Tullal compositions of Nambiar. The author



introduces contemporary incidents and personalities into the story and depends upon them for humour as they appear as glaring anachronisms. This aggressive intrusion of Sanskrit naturally created a flutter among scholars. These views were put forth in a work called *Lilathilakam* (14th century) which aimed at the systematisation of *Manipravalam* by which name the mixture of Malayalam and Sanskrit was called.

Mazhamangalam and a few other Nambudiri authors continued the *Champu* tradition for a century and a half thereafter, and with Meppathur who thoroughly Sanskritised the whole composition it died a natural death. Cherusseri representing the indigenous Pattu school and Puna, the newly formed Manipravala school, seem to have lived more or less in the same period.

EZHUTHACHAN'S EPICS

The various current of literary growth which we have been noticing till now converge in Ezhuthachan, literally the father of letters, the unrivalled epic poet of Malayalam who lived in the early part of the 15th century. The epics *Ramayanam* and *Mahabharatham* he reproduced in Malayalam with an originality, vigour and devotional fervour never before known in the language. His style and diction possessed unusual felicity and charm secured by the harmonious blending of Malayalam and Sanskrit and set the standard for all times. His austere personality left its unmistakable impress on his works which were used for daily recitation or *Parayanam* not only

as a token of regard and appreciation of their literary excellence by the people but also as a mark of respect for his spiritual dignity and stature felt by the people of Kerala. A devout Bhaktha of Vishnu as he has, he preferred to render the *Adhyatma Ramayana* into Malayalam adding literary embellishments wherever necessary. As a literary work *Adhayatma Ramayana* does not rank high in Sanskrit, but Ezhuthachan was attracted by the spiritual conception of Rama embodied therein.

Though a yogi and devotee himself Ezhuthachan never forgot the martial traditions of the Malayalees and his description of battles in his epics, are particularly graphic and vivid. The fights between Bali and Sugriva, Rama and Ravana in *Ramayana* and Bhishma and Arjuna, Arjuna and Karna and Bhima and Dusasana in *Mahabharatam* offer thrilling examples. In *Mahabharata* he showed his amazing skill as a literary artist. The original *Bharatam* lacks unity as it is interspersed with various *Upakavyama* that sometimes disfigure the general outline of the main story. Ezhuthachan reduced the minor episodes to the barest minimum and made the story of the Pandavas the central theme of his epic and Krishna the hidden power behind the throne. His *Mahabharata* therefore shines as an original literary work, perfect in parts and in general design and perspective.

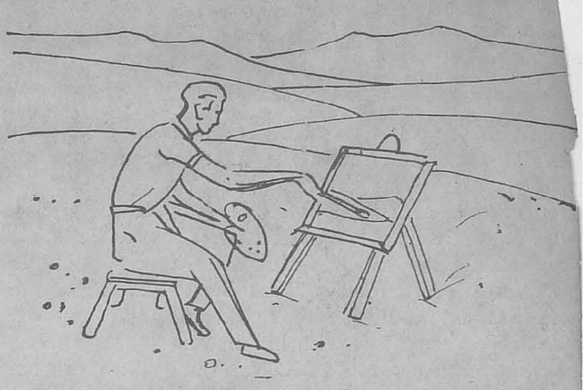
KUNCHAN NAMBIAR'S SATIRE

The Ezhuthachan tradition still lingers in Malayalam although its active followers continued to exercise their influence only for a century and half since his death. At this epoch rose another genius by name Kunchan Nambiar, who was to revolutionise literary thought and expression in Malayalam for some time. Kunchan Nambiar's role was that of a satirist.

During his time (17th century), owing to machinations of foreign powers the society of Kerala and its administrative machinery suffered a setback. Disorganisation and degeneracy were the result. With his natural wit, and his poetical powers Kunchan Nambiar tried to improve society by his satire. His compositions are called *Thullal*—again a survival of *Pattu* style—which are sung to the accompaniment of dance and acting. There is hardly a community in Malabar that escaped his satire.

KATHAKALI

During this period another art, viz., Kathakali reached the zenith of its development. The art of dance is a very ancient institution in Kerala, and



Kathakali as an art also has a long history. Its literature, however, is not so old and dates from Kottarakkara Rajah, contemporary with Punam, who hailed from Central Travancore about 600 years ago. He composed eight plays out of *Ramayana*—another instance of Vaishnavic influence, but their literary standard is not of a high order. A veritable genius in the field appeared in the person of Kottayathu Tampuran, 150 years later in North Malabar. He was equally competent in writing and acting. His four plays set the standard for the subsequent writers who followed in quick succession. Two Rajahs of Travancore, Karthika and Aswathi Tirunal, Unnayi Wariyar and Irayimman Tampi, deserve special mention in this connection. Nearly all Kathakali plays are now in print and an equal number remains unpublished.

The century that followed may be called the dark period in the political and literary history of Kerala. The policy of divide and rule followed by the foreign powers such as Dutch, French and English fostered internal jealousy and rivalry, and the administrative machinery was once more upset and undermined, leading to absence of peace and security. With the spread of education under the British regime cultural and literary interests revived.

Kerala Varma, Chandu Menon and Raman Pillay were the pioneers of the new movement. Kerala Varma is a product of the classical school and has two contributions to his credit, his immortal translation of *Sakuntalam* and an original autobiographical poem, *Mayurasandesam*. Chandu Menon leads in the realm of novel by his social novels *Indulekha* and *Sarada*, while Raman Pillay with his three historical romances *Marthanda Varma, Dharma Rajah* and Rama-rajabhahadoor is unsurpassed in his field. *Bhutarayar* by Appan Tampuran and *Viruthan Sanku* by Karattu Achutha Menon are other classics. Ambadi Narayana Poduval, M.R.K.C. Sukumaran and

Kumaran dominated the realm of the short story during this period.

NEW FORCES

Venmani Namburi and Kunjikuttan Tampuran heralded the new revival in poetry which threw off the classical yoke; but their preference to the old narrative pattern soon paved the way for the rise of the romantic school with Kumaran Assan, Vallathol and Nalappatan its guiding stars. Ulloor the disciple of Kerala Varma maintained his eminence in the classical field. In the realm of scholarship A. R. Rajaraja Varma late with his monumental grammar, *Keralapaniniyam*, and P. K. Narayana Pillay with his brilliant essays on Cherusseri and Nambiar and Attoor Krishna Pisharody (still happily with us) with his classical commentaries on *Unnunili Sandesam* and *Lilathilakam* have earned everlasting fame.

Recently there has been a move among the younger generation to establish a "progressive school" inspired by the veteran scholar and writer A. Balakrishna Pillay. They aim at the "realistic presentation of life" in literature and look upon Russian classics like *Mother* by Maxim Gorky as their model.

In conclusion, I may add a word about the policy followed by the Madras Government to encourage the South Indian languages. The institution of the Poet-Laureateship and prizes for notable works in poetry and prose in these languages have given a fresh impetus to writers who are now vying with each other in a healthy competitive spirit to produce their best. Madras State has stolen a march in this respect over other States who do not so far have a scheme of this kind.

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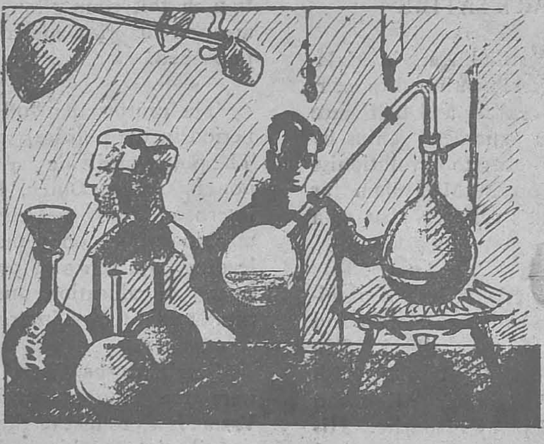
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